

myself best. I can't spell, Bernie. I'm a horrible writer. I get disorganized."

"Believe me, R.L., your misery will organize itself, unless you consciously organize and shape it in real life."

"You mean I don't have any excuses left? My spelling and grammar?" She asked hopefully.

"Use a computer, R.L., one with a grammar and spellcheck. It's amazing, as you already know, what they can do."

"Yeah," she said, "too bad. Technology is making me write."

"You got it."

The Hard Life and Good Times of R.L. Peabody

R.L. Peabody

My father, I think, is on every committee there ever was. My parents are neat dressers. I'd get a purple mohawk just to be different from them. Recently, I heard my mother saying that she had spent all this money on me. I had a computer, and a tutor, and an allowance, and all she came out with was your average teenager. WWWWWEEEEELLLL, EXCUSE ME.

It was Sunday and I had to go to youth group. My mother walked in and said, "Take off that tee-shirt and put on one with a collar."

Well! I was insulted. That was my favorite tee-shirt.

Several seconds later my father walked in and said, "Have you done your homework?"

"No, I just have a little bit of math to do." I sat there for a minute.

"Well, do it!"

I sat down to do my math when my mother rushed in and said, "Why don't you put on your shirt?"

"Well, Dad said..."

"I don't care what your father said!"

I started to put on my shirt when—wouldn't you know it—my father rushed in and said, "Why aren't you doing your homework?"

"Well, Mom said..."

"So what! Do your homework."

Now you know why teenage suicides are up.

My parents put a lot of pressure on me because they want me to be the best I can. This in turn is driving me crazy.

I think that insanity runs in the family. First my aunt (who was at Westminster) got so sick of study hall that she threw her books out the window. Second, it is a tradition to fight with your mother. I fight with my mother. My mother fought with hers. I think I'll commit myself to an institution where all I will have is peace and quiet, and there won't be people running in saying, "Have you done your homework yet?" Maybe this is a good idea. I don't know.

I called my father to tell him that I got a note this week for not finishing my work. He nearly plastered me to the wall with threats.

I will describe a normal day in my life.

There isn't one.

Anyway, here is my life after three o'clock. I get out of school and go to the carpool. Dennis (eight years old) whines, "You're not my mother so you can't tell me to put

on my seat belt!" Then he proceeds to show off his toy robot that is plastic and costs nineteen dollars. Howie screams, "By the power of Greyskull, I have the power!" Louise cries because Dennis has told her to shut up. Michelle, my younger sister, hits me for no good reason. Hugo picks on Dennis and makes him cry and then he doesn't stop. Mrs. Parker (a.k.a. Goody-Two-Shoes Harper) panics and yells, "Are we all here?" about a thousand times, and off we go. We almost get into a wreck and Mrs. Harper screams, "YOU BASTARD!!!" Oh! Excuse me, children."

Finally we get to my house. "Thank you," I say politely. I think, "Thank you for getting me home in one piece." I should start taking the bus.

I'm walking up the stairs to our door. Our door is about two inches thick and looks like the entrance to Dracula's castle. Slam, I'm inside.

"Hi Honey, how was your day?"

"O.K.," I say drably.

"Want a snack?" Mom says with a smile on her face.

"Sure," I say, thinking that it sure had taken her a long time to ask. We walk into our ultra-funky kitchen. It is ultra-funky because just about everything is shades of white and shining. But the six burners and two ovens make the room instantly hot when my mother cooks. She holds out some grapes. They look about a thousand years old. They are brown and greasy and just plain gross-looking.

"Thanks," I lie.

I'm walking up the stairs to my poster-filled room. My dog wanders in. He's black and white and looks like he's been hit by a steam roller. He's about a thousand years old.

I go and sit on my bed. Michelle comes dancing in in her new pink toe shoes. Michelle is really nice, but she has a

mad dog temper. Making her mad is like putting a cat into a bathtub.

"Look at my new shoes!" she says happily.

"Nice." I act really suave.

I really am more impressed than I act. She is better than me in a lot of ways, especially dancing.

It is five o'clock and I start to do my homework. I finish that as quickly as I can, because it is so boring. I go and get the basketball and start to play one on one. It is really, really hard because:

A. There is only one person playing, and

B. I am losing.

7:00 p.m.: I go inside because I hear Mother calling.

"R.L., dinner time."

I go to dinner and see on my plate that I have green peas, carrots, mashed potatoes and gravy. I think, "What can I do with this?"

I start assembling my peas into a line, and I appoint the leader. He starts the attack and rolls into the mashed potatoes, and the gravy pours on top of him. "I'm drowning!!!" He yells with pain in his voice. So I decide to put him out of his misery, and I eat him. "Attack," I hear the second in command yell. All the peas roll into the mashed potatoes and gravy. The giant carrot is about to attack the mashed potatoes when my illusion is broken by a scream.

"R.L., your food is for eating and not for playing in,"

Mom says.

"But Mom, I am in the middle of an important battle."

"EAT!"

8:00 p.m.: It's time to take a bath. I do that without drowning. Now it's prime time on T.V. I fight it by playing computer games. I am playing Castle Wolfenstein. The

guard tells me to stop and I don't. He shoots me.

8:30 p.m.: I finish what homework I didn't do at 5:00. Then I turn on prime time and watch an exciting rendition of "The A-Team." "Mr. T." looks uglier than ever. Then I turn to Channel 36 and finish watching a dumb horror movie. If I had named it I would have named it *Godzilla Meets Funny-Looking Spider-Thing*.

9:30: I go and kiss my mom and dad goodnight. From then on, I usually am free to do what I want, but sometimes Dad tells me to go to sleep. Tonight he doesn't.

11:30 p.m.: I turn to see Johnny Carson telling dumb jokes. I get sleepy and get up and walk the ever-seeming a thousand miles to my T.V. and back.

"O.K., get comfortable."

I'm still not comfortable, I think.

Finally, I get to sleep only to wake up and find the lights in my room on. I get up and secretly wonder if the boogeyman is in my closet. I cuddle down in my bed and fall asleep.

Here ends an average day in R.L. Peabody's life.

After the story, which the class seemed to like—particularly the one-on-one basketball game—everyone applauded and commented, everyone, that is, but Ian Gardiner.

"Are you jealous?" asked Lanny Butler. "I am. It was great."

"It was really funny," said Anna Rossini.

R.L. couldn't help but smile; she respected Anna. "Thanks," she said.

Then R.L. looked at Ian. "I don't understand. What was it

you didn't like?" Her smile had disappeared now and she looked almost pale. Self-doubt, sometimes overwhelming anyway because of her history with learning disabilities, was knocking at her door, threatening re-entrance.

He shrugged. "I just didn't think it was very funny."

"Come on, Ian," said Lanny.

Maury Michaels rolled her eyes. "He's jealous. Come out with it, Ian, it's not fair to R.L."

"To R.L.?" I asked.

"I don't want him doing it to me when *my* story's read," said Maury.

"Me neither," said Anna.

"Out with it, Ian," I said. "Even if you didn't like it you could have applauded unless you wanted her to feel bad, to notice. What's *your* story?"

"She's insulting—little subversive comments in math class. She does it all the time. Little comments every time I raise my hand or go to the chalkboard."

"He's right," said R.L. "I do. I hadn't realized. I'm really sorry, Ian, no excuses, I really am. Oh my God this is so embarrassing. Will you let me explain why? Please? I'm really embarrassed and really sorry. I've done it to others too. I see by your faces. I'm sorry to everyone. Okay, listen, it's because I'm stupid in math, because I have absolutely no idea what is going on in there and never have, I mean, I've been like this all my life, stupid, I'm not making excuses I'm just trying to tell you why."

"Yes," he said. Now he surrendered. "Your story was really funny. I loved that one-on-one basketball game, and Mrs. Harper, she really is like that, I know her! And dinner at the Peabodys was really great, R.L."

She beamed: "Thank you, Ian."

"Passions beat about Simon on the mountaintop with